

# **COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION**

## **Massachusetts Telecommuting Policy**

**August 1, 2000**

### **Policy**

It is the policy of the Commonwealth to encourage, in appropriate circumstances, the creation of telecommuting opportunities for state employees. Telecommuting has been found to benefit society by reducing energy consumption, decreasing environmental pollution and reducing traffic congestion. Additionally, telecommuting has been found to benefit employers and employees by reducing office costs, saving commuting costs and allowing flexibility in work schedules.

### **Definition of Telecommuting**

Telecommuting is a form of telework, which is the use of telecommunications technology to work from any remote location. In most instances, it is the act of working from home, thus eliminating travel to and from an office. There are very few jobs where it would be practical to telecommute five (5) days per week. Some jobs, however, have tasks that could be accomplished while telecommuting one to two (1-2) days per week or on an ad hoc, project-specific basis. These tasks may include, but are not limited to: auditing reports; batch work; calculating; computer programming; data entry; editing; planning; reading; project management; research; spreadsheets; bookkeeping/budgeting; word processing and writing. Generally, jobs suitable for telecommuting will have defined tasks with clearly measurable results. Ultimately, whether or not management decides to utilize telecommuting as an option will depend on the operational needs of the Department/Agency.

## **Limitations/Benefits of Telecommuting**

*Limitations of telecommuting can include:*

- The potential for distractions at home
- Reduced exposure and interaction with coworkers
- Lack of supervisory control
- Difficulty in locating telecommuters during work hours
- Should not be a substitute for primary childcare or eldercare arrangements

*Benefits of telecommuting can include:*

- Increased productivity (including better time management and work quality)
- Improved employee morale (including reduced stress and a better work/family balance)
- Reduced overhead and operational expenses of the employer including real estate associated costs
- Improved employee retention and recruitment
- Reduced use of sick or personal time among employees

## **Telecommuting Program Criteria**

The decision to have a Department/Agency telecommuting program is at the sole discretion of each Appointing Authority. Additionally, the decision to approve an individual telecommuting arrangement is also at the sole discretion of the Appointing Authority. In terms of supervision, clear expectations and measurable tasks are essential components in considering whether or not telecommuting would be an option. Management must supervise telecommuting employees by developing a system of distributing work appropriate for telecommuting and designating tasks with measurable outputs that can ensure appropriate levels of employee accountability.

Departments/Agencies that wish to develop a formal telecommuting program must address all of the following criteria in their program development:

- Develop a formal telecommuting policy that is reviewed and approved by the Human Resources Division.
- Designate a “Telecommuting Coordinator” and state what responsibilities he/she will hold.
- Identify positions permitted to telecommute by their “functional” responsibilities and by job title.
- Consider potential telecommuting candidates based on their demonstrated ability to work independently with limited supervision.
- Determine what equipment, if any, the Department/Agency will supply and which equipment the employee must supply.
- Provide training to telecommuters, supervisors, and/or coworkers regarding participation in a telecommuting program.

- Execute a “telecommuting agreement” with employees outlining the specific parameters of their telecommuting arrangement, including the method of recording and approving work time and a provision requiring prior authorization for the use of overtime (See sample contract).
- Create a Telecommuting Work Plan, to be included as part of the Telecommuting Agreement, which addresses the following:
  - a. Specific description of duties to be performed
  - b. Established workdays and normal work hours
  - c. Explanation as to how supervision will be provided
  - d. Explanation as to how work products and outputs will be monitored and reviewed
  - e. Explanation as to how attendance and leave records will be maintained and processed
- Submit a copy of each telecommuting agreement to the Human Resources Division.
- Notify the Human Resources Division in writing of any changes to, or cancellation of, telecommuting arrangements.

The Appointing Authority may discontinue a telecommuting arrangement at any time if continuation would not be productive, efficient or otherwise not in the best interest of the Department/Agency.

### **Capital Costs and Management Supervision**

The Department/Agency is not required to provide equipment for telecommuting; however, Departments/Agencies may choose to provide all or part of the necessary office equipment for accomplishing work assignments.

In addition to possible home office costs, the following expenses can also be associated with telecommuting programs:

- Staff Time:
  - Program guideline and contract development
  - Program management
  - Home office site inspections
  - Training time for telecommuters, supervisors, and/or coworkers
- Telecommunications:
  - Office network upgrades (or purchase) for remote access
  - Telephone installation charges
  - Long distance charges
- Instructors and training material

Many of these expenses are initial start-up costs incurred only as the program is established.

**Implementation Considerations**

It is the Commonwealth's intention that Agency-specific policies allow that employee participation in telecommuting arrangements be voluntary in nature. However, nothing in this policy, or in any Agency policy developed in accordance with this master policy, shall be deemed to abrogate or mitigate any employee or employer contractual rights as they relate to the staffing or assignment of personnel.

**Further Information**

Departments/Agencies that wish to consider developing telecommuting policies are welcome to contact Mark D'Angelo, Deputy Director of Employee Relations for the Human Resources Division, at (617) 727-5403 to discuss the viability of such a program for their Department/Agency.